

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

040752Z Nov 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001257

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [TBIO](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA AI UPDATE: QUASHING OUTBREAK RUMORS

REF: A. RANGOON 1219

[1](#)B. RANGOON 1238

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Rumors of avian influenza (AI) outbreaks are making the rounds in Burma. A reported suspicious outbreak in Tachileik, eastern Shan State appears to be unsubstantiated. FAO says it heard that the GOB sent a team to investigate a reported outbreak in northern Shan State, but knows nothing more. The Minister of Health revealed that it recently investigated a disease outbreak in Mon State and concluded it was malaria and Type A influenza, not AI. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Rumors made the rounds in Rangoon this week about suspected AI outbreaks in Burma. One rumor held that two women in the border town Tachileik of eastern Shan State, near Thailand, were ill with an unknown fever. Embassy contacts in Tachileik said they have not heard of any such outbreak. CG Chiang Mai said their contacts in Chiang Rai Province, which Tachileik borders, had no information on any AI outbreaks in Tachileik or adjoining areas of Thailand. An FAO officer verified that the FAO knew nothing about an outbreak in Tachileik, but added that they had heard that the GOB sent a team to northern Shan State to investigate reports of a possible outbreak in either Muse or Namkhan, two towns that border China. The FAO has not received of any results yet from that investigation.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In a meeting at City Hall on November 2 (ref B), the Rangoon mayor told the Charge that the GOB is following AI developments in the region. He acknowledged that there have been confirmed cases in neighboring countries and that AI posed a potential threat to Burma. He insisted, however, there have been no AI cases in Burma to date. The Charge said that international experts might be of help if they could visit Rangoon to share information on AI threats. The mayor said this would be a good idea and he added that Burma lacks sufficient resources of its own and needs international assistance.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In a November 3 briefing to representatives of foreign missions and UN agency heads on the activities and plans of the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Minister of Health, Dr. Kyaw Myint, said that the GOB wanted to be totally transparent about AI. He cited a suspicious disease outbreak that occurred in Kyaikto, Mon State, "about ten days ago." A cluster of ten children, and groups of chickens and pigs fell ill there with fever. Two children died. Subsequent investigation revealed that both of them had malaria (*P. falciparum*), so the MOH concluded that cerebral malaria was the likely cause of death. The MOH also determined that the other children affected had Type A influenza. The MOH cooperated closely with WHO, which sent blood samples from the children to Bangkok for further testing within 24 hours. The MOH reported that the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department took blood samples from the diseased chickens and pigs, but the MOH has no information on the results of those tests to date.

[1](#)5. (SBU) At the MOH briefing one Director General from the ministry noted that Burma has no stockpile of Tamiflu. He said even if Burma could obtain Tamiflu, the country could ill-afford to pay the high cost of the medicine. He wondered aloud how the MOH could possibly protect its medical personnel who would be called on to treat patients in the event of an AI outbreak among humans in Burma.

[1](#)6. (SBU) COMMENT: Although Burma claims it is still AI-free, the authorities are becoming more nervous over the likelihood of AI eventually being discovered in Burma and the dire consequences they would face in the event of a pandemic. The recent closer cooperation between the GOB and WHO in collecting and testing samples is a new and positive sign. While the MOH may be endeavoring to be as forthcoming as possible on AI issues, we are not sure the rest of the government will embrace the same standard of openness. END COMMENT.  
VILLAROSA